

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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## Laboring In The Gospel

by Dan Trygg

“And we continuously-proclaim Him (Christ-in-you), reminding/admonishing/warning everyone, and continually-teaching everyone with all skill, in order that we might present every person fully-mature in Christ. To this end also I toil-to-exhaustion, strenuously-struggling according to His inworking, the one inworking in me in power.” Colossians 1:28,29

“But we ask you, brethren, that you observe the ones diligently-laboring among you, and standing-before you in the Lord and reminding you, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” I Thessalonians 5:12,13

“...discipline yourself toward godliness: for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is beneficial toward all things, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement worthy of all acceptance. For it is for this we toil-to-exhaustion and strenuously-wrestle, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.” I Timothy 4:8-10

There are six different Greek word stems for the notion of “work” or “labor”. They each have a different nuance, word-picture or “flavor” that they express. By far, the main one is *ergon*, which is the generic word for “work, action, deed”. The variant forms of this word occur 237 times in the NT. English derivatives include “ergonomics” or “energy”. In Philippians 4:3, a different word, *suzugos*, meaning “yokefellow”, indicates a co-worker, someone “joined under a double yoke” in a common effort. This is the only time this word occurs in the NT. The Greek word, *mochthos*, is used three times to indicate “severe, toilsome work” or “hardship” (II Cor. 11:27; I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:8). Another word, *ponos*, can mean “hard labor, toil” or “pain, distress, affliction” (Col. 4:13; Rev. 16:10,11; 21:4). In Philippians 1:27 and 4:3, Paul uses another word, *sunathleō*, to refer to someone who “toils or strives together with another person in a common cause or struggle”. You can probably see the root for, “athlete” in that word, a “striver” or “contender”. **The word for our study today is “kopos”.** This root is used 41 times in the NT. **It means “trouble, weariness, toilsome labor, or hard work that implies difficulty and distress”.** It has three very different uses in the NT. (1.) **It can mean emotional or physical trouble, pain, bother, exhaustion or weariness** (Matt. 11:28; 26:10; Mk. 14:6; Lk. 5:5; 11:7; 18:5; Jn. 4:6; Gal. 6:17). (2.) **It refers to difficult, toilsome, frustrating, wearying work or labor** (Matt. 6:28; Lk. 5:5; 12:27; Acts 20:35; I Cor. 4:12; II Cor. 6:5; 11:27; Eph. 4:28; I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:8; II Tim. 2:6). And, interestingly, (3.) **It is also used for the work or effort involved in spiritual growth** (I Tim. 4:10) **or in the work of ministry** (Jn. 4:38 [3x]; Rom. 16:8,12 [2x]; I Cor. 3:8; 15:10,58; 16:16; II Cor. 10:15; 11:23; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col 1:29; I Thess. 1:3; 3:5; 5:12; I Tim 5:17; Rev. 2:2; 14:13).

I went back to take a closer look at the forms of *ergon* and discovered that it is used about 15 times in reference to ministry, or ministry workers (Matt. 9:37,38; Lk.10:2,7; Acts 13:2; 15:38; I Cor. 3:13; 9:11,13; Phil. 1:22; I Tim. 3:1; 5:18; II Tim. 2:15; 4:5; Rev. 2:2). I find it interesting that this much more predominant word is not used *more* in reference to ministry work. Instead, the Holy Spirit directed the authors to use a word that is *less* common. *Kopos* occurs less than one fifth as often as *ergon*, ...but it actually is used of ministry work *more often* than *ergon* is! In fact, over half of the occurrences of *kopos* are in reference to ministry work, some 21 times! This certainly is not happenstance. It is an intentional and important description of what ministry work will require. So, just **on a surface read of the NT, you would definitely get a strong message that the work of ministry is often a challenging, difficult, toilsome, and wearying kind of activity.** It is not just *work*, ...it can be painful, frustrating, repetitive, exhausting, unresponsive, unyielding, hard, troublesome labor. **It requires courage, faith, discipline, concentration, dedication, resilience, determination, energy, grit and perseverance.**

We see some of this revealed in Paul’s comment in Colossians 1:28,29. **Notice the repetitive, continual nature of the verbs. Ministry work is not an A to Z proposition.** It is proclaiming, reviewing, returning to emphasize application, teaching again (from a different perspective), reminding, admonishing, reviewing again, challenging, insisting on growth and holding people to God’s standard, etc. It is like shepherding sheep, or pulling weeds. It is *not* a linear growth process. **It is dealing with all kinds of individuals, at various levels of maturity and seriousness, and trying to incite them to get serious about their walk with God,** when life is bombarding and distracting them non-stop. **It is frustrating and heartbreaking to watch as some people go through the same messes, over and over.** Some get set up and caught in the same trap, repeatedly. You can see it so plainly, but they apparently can’t, ...or aren’t ready to change, yet. Others seem serious, at least to some degree, but you can see that they, too, have settled for less. You have to deal with sin issues, spiritual warfare, distractions, worldliness and false religion. **The goal is not just to get them to come to church, or keep them in church. It is to grow them up to maturity in Christ.** Those who really *get* that, and who are willing to *do what it takes* to get there, are few and far between. Like they say, **“You have to go through a lot of dirt to find the gold, or the diamonds.”** What you see in

the jewelry shop is not at all what is found out in the field. *A piece of raw gold ore, or a diamond in the rough, doesn't look all that appealing, or promising. When they are refined, processed, cleaned up and polished, however, they can be stunning!* That is a good analogy for ministry. Each person has great potential in Jesus, but they have to go through a maturing process that will take off the dirt and polish off the rough edges, so they can shine well for God. Unlike dealing with inanimate material, however, **people have to choose to go through this growth process.** It is a lot of work, and many are resistant to change. **The minister is to keep after them, and incite them to keep moving deeper in their walk with God.** Sometimes people are open and appreciative. At other times, they get defiant and defensive. It doesn't change the calling. We are to do all we can to move that person toward maturity. **Paul said that *this took everything he had.* He labored-to-exhaustion, and intensely-wrestled, with all his strength, and with all the power and energy God gave him** to try to move these people to completeness in Christ.

You have to remember that **when Paul was actively inciting people to grow, the world was very different.** There were no big church buildings, or Sunday schools. There was no large-group preaching meeting. When people heard of "minister", they did not think of "religious professional". They thought of "table waiter". **There was no prestige or recognition for being a "minister". In fact, Paul was looked upon with suspicion, by many.** He was starting home groups, proclaiming some "new religion" that people had never heard of. These home meetings were gatherings where people got to know one another. **They got to know one another's issues, and spoke into one another's lives.** There was no distraction about church buildings or any thought of job security or promotion. **Paul was there to make disciples, ...to get them off to a good start, and then move on.** He was always plowing up new ground. **The main thing was to keep the main thing the main thing, ...which was to get people to follow Christ in everything!** *All his work depended upon getting people to get serious and work toward maturity.* In spite of all the differences between his time and ours, the main thing is *still* to be the main thing, ...and the success of *our* work in ministry comes down to the *same thing*, getting people to be serious about their faith, and work to become mature.

**Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, encouraging them to take note of those who were toiling among them, those who were openly standing as examples for them, and were actively reminding them or admonishing them toward growth.** Paul helped them identify these "true leaders", and encouraged them to esteem them very highly in love, for the work they were doing. **These are key qualities for leadership in ministry:** (1.) **They were actively working among them already.** They could not keep themselves from speaking into the lives of others to move them toward Christ. (2.) **They were already paying the price of pushing through discomfort and sacrifice in order to serve.** This was *toilsome, wearying, costly* labor. (3.) **They were already "standing before" them in the Lord.** The occasion of the letter was that Paul had been driven out by persecution, before he had the opportunity to get things really established (Acts 17:1-10). He sent Timothy back to check on them, and help them (I Thess. 3:1-8). There was no one "in charge". Paul's words were meant to help them recognize those gifted to be future leaders. To be "standing before them" is an idiom for someone who takes initiative to lead, but also refers to someone who lives as an open example to others (I Tim. 4:11-16). In some contexts, it refers to people who "stand before" in order to be ready to serve. **And, (4.) They were already "admonishing" or "reminding" them of the truth in Christ.** Paul said that those doing these things should be highly valued because of their work (*ergon*). **These would be the upcoming, effective leaders. They are already doing the toilsome work of ministry.** They have the inner motivation to get involved, get equipped, take responsibility and speak up to help others grow.

In I Timothy 4, Paul warns against false teaching. He encouraged Timothy to "point these things out to the brethren", and be "nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine" (vs. 6). He also charged him to "discipline yourself unto godliness". **The word for "discipline" is the Greek word, *gumnazō*, from which our English word, "gymnasium" is derived. Basically, it means to "train yourself", ...as in to "work out" or "exercise" yourself. Any time I have ever had an exercise regimen I was trying to follow, it was "toilsome labor", not all fun and games.** In order to get the results I wanted, I had to *exercise*, ...whether I wanted to, or not, ...whether it was comfortable, or uncomfortable, ...whether it was easy, or hard, ...whether it was convenient, or inconvenient. I had to do it day-in and day-out. **The same is true of our spiritual disciplines.** Discipline for the body is only of a limited benefit, since it only deals with our present physical health. Discipline unto godliness is profitable toward all things, since it has application for this present life, and will impact eternity. Paul then says, **"For it is for this we toil-to-exhaustion and strenuously-wrestle, because we have fixed our hope on the living God."** Note that *these are the same two words Paul used in Colossians 1:29.* In the early church, they "*continued unremittingly in the doctrine of the apostles, the sharing, to the breaking of the bread, and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42). They *devoted themselves* to these disciplines, day-in and day-out, convenient or inconvenient, so they would grow. **There is some toilsome labor not only in the work of ministry, but also in personal discipline for growth in our walk in Christ.** If *we* have fixed *our* hope on God, we ought to discipline ourselves and labor in the things that will mature us.